



MEDICAL BOARD OF CALIFORNIA  
**BOARD OF PODIATRIC MEDICINE**  
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## INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

Doctors of Podiatric Medicine (DPMs) are highly-trained specialists in foot and ankle medicine, rehabilitation, and surgery. California law requires that they:

- graduate from one of seven accredited podiatric medical schools. These are four-year specialty medical schools emphasizing the foot & ankle
- pass "National Board" exams administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS)
- complete at least one-year of approved postgraduate residency training [required since 1987]
- pass a rigorous, standardized oral clinical exam [required since 1984] testing candidates on the foot and ankle, general medicine, and medical emergencies
- complete 50 hours of continuing medical education (CME) and satisfy one of the seven continuing competence requirements every two years

### DPMs and MDs - What's the Difference?

Medical doctors (MDs) receive general training in medical school and learn their specialty in postgraduate residencies. Their license does not restrict them to their specialty area, but it is a violation of law for any doctor to practice outside their area of competence. To further protect consumers, the scope of practice of podiatric medical doctors (DPMs) is limited by the license itself to the foot and ankle. Many individuals provide foot care, but only licensed doctors (MDs, DPMs, or DOs) may diagnose, treat, and prescribe for medical conditions. Podiatric (foot and ankle) care is provided by some MDs (usually family practitioners or orthopaedic surgeons), as well as by DPMs. Among all three groups, there are both good and bad doctors.

*Information for Consumers* is a free publication of the Board of Podiatric Medicine (BPM), the unit of the Medical Board that licenses and disciplines DPMs. Copies may be requested from your doctor, legislator, local consumer protection offices, or directly from BPM.

MD residency programs approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) are excellent, but few concentrate on the foot and ankle. If you are considering seeing an orthopaedic surgeon or another MD for foot care, ask if they have completed relevant ACGME-approved training of at least 12-months duration, such as the Residency Education in Foot and Ankle Orthopedics program that was initiated in 1995. DPM residency programs are approved by the Council on Podiatric Medical Education (CPME).

Today MDs and DPMs work together and train each other in multi-specialty teams for the benefit of the patient. There is increasing competition between medical specialties, but beware of any doctor who "bad mouths" all the members of a competing group. The greater the competition, the better off you are.

## Consumer Checklist

**Check the Doctor's Qualifications & Choose Carefully!** - Many patients become "consumer smart" only after a bad experience. Don't gamble with your health.

- Call the Medical Board's Verifications Hotline--916/263-2382--to make sure your doctor is licensed. Ask about malpractice and discipline history (revocation, suspension, or probation). This information is also available online at [www.docboard.org/ca/df/casearch.htm](http://www.docboard.org/ca/df/casearch.htm)
- Ask your doctor about training. Ask if the doctor is certified by an approved medical specialty board. For DPMs, the CPME has approved only two: the American Board of Podiatric Surgery, and the American Board of Podiatric Orthopedics & Primary Podiatric Medicine. If you are seeing a non-podiatric doctor, ask what specific foot & ankle training they have. Make sure they have completed relevant ACGME-approved training of at least 12-months duration, such as the Residency Education in Foot & Ankle Orthopedics program initiated in 1995.
- Call toll-free 1-888-THE FEET (1-888-843-3338), American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons, for information about surgery.
- Call 1-800-794-8988 (California Podiatric Medical Association, 2430 K Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95816) to ask about the profession's code of ethics and peer review programs.
- Ask your family physician to recommend a doctor of podiatric medicine.
- Obtain second opinions before surgery. Ask the surgeon to explain the risks, possible complications, and alternative methods of treatment. Ask how often they perform any recommended surgical procedure, and what the results have been. Costs should be fully disclosed before treatment.
- Except in emergencies, beware of rushed surgeries without attempts at conservative care. Be wary of multiple surgeries, claims about laser surgery (lasers do not cut bone), and other potential come-ons and scams such as "painless surgery," "miracle cures," "discount coupons," and "free foot exams."
- Don't choose doctors by the size of their advertisements.
- Call 1-800-FOOT-CARE, the Foot Care Information Center sponsored by the American Podiatric Medical Association. It has free brochures answering many consumer questions.

**Patient Rights** - Hospitals must post a policy on patient rights. If you don't see it, ask for a copy.

**Fraud Hotlines** - Call the Federal Inspector General (1-800-447-8477, that is HHS-TIPS) if you suspect your doctor, hospital, nursing home, or other provider is ripping off Medi-Cal or Medicare. The State Attorney General's Medi-Cal Fraud unit can be reached through 1-800-722-0432.

**HMO Problems** - Call 1-800-400-0815 (State Department of Corporations) to file a complaint about a health maintenance organization. Seniors in Medicare can call 1-800-638-6833.

***FILING COMPLAINTS ABOUT DOCTORS--Call 1-800-MED-BDCA (1-800-633-2322) for information or to file a complaint. Written complaints should be addressed to: Central Complaints, Medical Board of California, 1426 Howe Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95825.*** Central Complaints can also advise about Better Business Bureau arbitration, Small Claims Court, filing with the profession's peer review program, or other agencies that might be able to help you.